

Frimley Green Traffic Lights

Background

As part of the Deepcut development traffic mitigation, it is proposed to install 4-way traffic lights at the heart of Frimley Green, the largest infrastructure change in the village for 30 years. This was set out as a planning obligation as part of the planning approval process.

There is local concern that this will have an adverse effect on traffic congestion and will cause greater delays. The recent online petition received 1220 votes, which is extraordinarily high for such a small village and is testament to the volume and strength of feeling amongst residents.

Consideration should be given to delaying road infrastructure changes until the extent of increased traffic flows can actually be measured. Frimley Green is not a 'town centre', it is a village. The installation of 4-way traffic lights and the associated congestion and pollution this will cause is considered a step too far in preserving Frimley Green as a village.

Can the decision be changed?

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 s.106A(1)(a), as amended, makes specific provision for planning obligations to be modified or discharged by agreement between the local planning authority and the original applicant.

Why should the decision be changed?

There are substantial weakness and omissions in the traffic reports, and insufficient consideration of alternatives. With more robust evidence, a more balanced assessment of the alternatives, and closer involvement with the community, it is likely that a better, more well-rounded solution can be found.

What are the weaknesses in the existing evidence?

These are potentially lengthy and complex. Here are the main ones in summary; more detail is available on request.

1. The primary rationale for removing the roundabouts and replacing them with lights is based on a 14 year ahead forecast of estimated traffic flows at peak time. They assume an averaged 20% increase in development by 2026 resulting in an evenly distributed increase of traffic in each direction. This suggests that for part of peak time, two arms of the junction will potentially be over capacity.
 - No information was given as to the likely inaccuracy of these figures and there were huge variations in the different reports using the same models. They are a brave attempt to predict the future but are no substitute for actual real time evidence.
 - In looking solely at weekday peak time periods this only covers a small percentage of all traffic movements. The traffic flows well at off-peak times but with lights delays would increase significantly. The peak time forecasts with lights show net increases in queues, though perhaps a more evenly distributed. The total increase in delays is not shown but realistically it could be a 300-400%, and up to 1000% at certain times. This information should have been provided.
 - The forecast data with traffic lights is based upon the design shown in drawing number 22729-LEA1154. This assumes that part of the village green can be lost to allow for widening of the road. The village green is protected under the Commons Act and whether this loss to the green is permissible is at best debatable. It would certainly meet

ITEM 8

with strong resistance from residents. It was presumptuous and biased to only consider evidence for one option, especially when permission for it may not be forthcoming.

2. Insufficient attention has been given to factors other than traffic flow.
 - No consideration has been given to the creation of rat runs, something that local residents can immediately spot
 - No consideration has been given to the aesthetics, visual impact and the nature of the village, again something that residents feel strongly about
 - Little consideration has been given to pedestrians, including the impact of pollution at crossings. Pedestrian movements and the impact on delays were potentially underestimated; every crossing event will require all four traffic lights to be at red.
 - Local factors, many of which are obvious to residents, are conspicuous by their absence. Many people have said that if there had been a proper and dedicated local consultation the various pitfalls and potential solutions could have been raised.
3. Insufficient consideration has been given to alternatives. Nowhere in any of the reports is there even a list of options considered and rejected. There is no balanced argument as to why lights are better than the alternatives, and no downsides of lights are shown.

What can be done about it?

It is for the council to decide but here are some proposed actions:

- (a) Enter into immediate negotiations with the representatives of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) with a view to delaying the installation of traffic lights. The s.106 agreement could be modified to ensure that road improvement work at Frimley Green is not started until further research is completed. The requirement to install lights before 450 houses are built could be dropped and replaced with a more relevant link, such as to measurable increases in traffic.
- (b) Employ a new, independent traffic specialist to undertake a review (the recent and widely publicised case in Morpeth offers a good example). This review should embrace all the factors mentioned above and should not only look at the junction itself but also the impact on all roads and junctions within a 500 yard radius.
- (c) Further traffic assessments should be based on real life data wherever possible. In other words, to monitor actual increases in traffic and not rely solely of forecasts. If traffic lights still emerge as a potential solution, evidence should come from a trial period with temporary 4-way lights (although this is would not perfectly simulate full-time lights if would provide better evidence than no trial at all).
- (d) Once the best 3 or 4 alternatives have been identified they should be published along with a balanced assessment of their relative advantages and disadvantages. This should be the basis for consultation with Frimley Green residents and any other identified interested parties, along the lines of DfT Transport Appraisal best practice.
- (e) The council should then further review the planning obligation, in negotiation with the DIO, with a view to implementing the agreed solution at the appropriate time.

Conclusion

The feeling of residents is very clear and considering the significant weaknesses in traffic assessment, it is hardly surprising that they have little faith in the decision to impose traffic lights on the village. The evidence upon which the decision was made is so narrow, one-sided and misleading that it cannot be relied upon. More robust and well-balanced evidence, and meaningful consultation, is essential. To ensure the best way forward for Frimley Green the decision to install traffic lights must be reviewed and the alternatives given full and careful consideration.

Related notes and links

Revising a Planning Obligation - s.106A(1)(a)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/106A>

Planning Obligations Guidance

See p.54 for guidance on public involvement

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7770/151363.pdf

Good practice guide to public engagement in planning. See p.15 for recommendation to consult on S106 issues

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/6312/Good-Practice-Guide-to-Public-Engagement-in-Development-Scheme-High-Res.pdf>

Surrey CC Roads and transport consultation good practice guide

We will consult or engage to:

- collect local knowledge
- manage expectations
- keep customers informed
- clarify customer priorities and concerns
- assist in the developing of solutions
- prevent later complaints and misunderstandings

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-and-transport-policies-plans-and-consultations/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/traffic-policy-and-good-practice/other-traffic-policies-and-good-practice/roads-and-transport-consultation-good-practice-guide>

Posting notice of changes to a crossing

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1986 s23(2)(b) - requirement to post a public notice when making changes to a pedestrian crossing (in this case changing from an uncontrolled crossing).

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/27/section/23>

Traffic forecast inaccuracy

Article published in *Transport Reviews 2014*. After reviewing the largest studies that compare forecasts with actual demand, they conclude that "it is clear that demand forecast inaccuracy is problematic for all project types".

<http://www.planetizen.com/node/69400>

Latest report on the misuse of transport models and the need to challenge what they predict.

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/b0a8d7f65b89838b6913e22e74a7976e?AccessKeyId=F97BC0358FF57B78C7DB&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

Best Practices

Roundabouts, safety and traffic flow - see 3.4.2

http://www.cedr.fr/home/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/2008/e_Road_Safety_Investments_Report.pdf

ITEM 8

Roundabout design

<http://www.designroundabouts.com/Advantages>

Alternatives options should be informed by successful best practices elsewhere. For examples see Poyton Regenerated:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vzDDMzq7d0>

Portishead example:

<http://thecityfix.com/blog/naked-streets-without-traffic-lights-improve-flow-and-safety/>

DfT Transport Analysis Guidance: transport appraisal process

Not mandatory for a project of this nature but does describe best practice principles.

In particular:

2.2.2 Stakeholder engagement - consultation, participation and information

1.2.12 maintenance / renewal costs

2.3.6 constraints on the shape of the plan (eg village green being protected)

2.4.10 sensitivity tests and alternative scenarios to test the robustness of a proposal

2.5.7 consultation and benchmarking

2.8 Generating options incl ref to the Eddington Transport Study - encourage the better use of existing infrastructure and avoiding “solutions in search of problems”

2.9.5 The Early Assessment Sifting Tool (EAST)

2.10.17 level of uncertainty of impact

2.11 produce option assessment report

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431185/web-tag-tag-transport-appraisal-process.pdf#nameddest=chptr01

WebTag Guidance - introduction, para 2 states that TAG should serve as a best practice guide

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/transport-analysis-guidance-webtag>

Environmental factors

Pollution at traffic lights

<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/features/stopping-red-lights-exposes-drivers-high-levels-air-pollution-new-study-finds>

Economic factors

<http://www.starconference.org.uk/star/2010/impact.pdf>

Commons Act 2006

Planning Inspectorate guidance on reregistration and exchange: Section 16 (for taking part of green for road widening) and S.38 (for being able to put up lights on the green).

Section B, note 5 - description of alternative courses of action considered and why no need to provide replacement land.

Section D, note 10 - provide options considered and why rejected

Section H, note 19 - need to advertise proposal

Annex A - need for extensive consultation

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/475172/S16_notes_on_completion.pdf